

Statement of

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Impact Aid and Education Programs Affecting Military Families

before the

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IMPACT AID AND THE MILITARY FAMILY

Mr. Chairman, NMFA and the families we represent are grateful to this Subcommittee for recognizing the importance of the federal responsibility embodied in the Impact Aid Program and its importance to military children. We thank all Congressional supporters of Impact Aid, especially the Members of the House and Senate Impact Aid Coalitions, for securing increased Impact Aid funding for FY 2004 and ensuring continued funding for the schools educating military students

living off the installation as well as students on the installation. Your continued support of Impact Aid translates into better education for approximately 550,000 military children and several million of their civilian classmates in school districts across the country.

NMFA also appreciates the inclusion in the FY 2005 budget proposal for the Department of Education (DoEd) of a Military Families Initiative, which would address the challenges faced by mobile military children who must move frequently from district to district because of their parents' military orders. It would provide \$10 million for competitive grants for states, school districts, or other organizations to develop strategies for the placement and enrollment of military students in appropriate classes and services; promote continuity in educational coursework and opportunities for participation in extra-curricular activities; provide support needed for military students to meet high-school graduation requirements; and support data management systems to help facilitate the transfer of information between school districts. While progress has been made in many districts and states to ease the educational transition of military children, NMFA encourages this Subcommittee to fund this initiative to enhance these local efforts. We also hope that the Department of Education will work closely with the education specialists in the Department of Defense Educational Opportunities Directorate to maximize the benefit for military children and reduce redundancy of efforts in easing the educational transition of mobile children.

NMFA presents this statement on behalf of military children. More than 80% of military children attend civilian schools dependent on Impact Aid. They will attend an average of six different schools during their K-12 education. Today's military force is an educated force and military members have high expectations for their children's education. More are accepting or rejecting assignments, or even deciding to leave the military, based on perceptions about the quality of education their children will receive at prospective duty stations. Because of the high military operations' tempo of the past several years, military children often had to adjust to the new school, face that week of standardized tests, fight for the spot on the newspaper staff, play the basketball game before a crowd of strangers without the support of their military parent. The increased demands placed on the military force have caused additional stress on the military family. Worry about the safety of a parent in a place far from home where people are shooting at each other while also worrying about your own safety at home make for powerful distractions from the business of education.

The support services offered by their schools are especially important to military families affected by war and frequent deployments. As servicemembers deploy to dangerous places, they want to know that their children's school buildings are secure, that school district leaders are working with installation leadership to ensure the safety of children at school and on the school buses. Schools also face the challenge of helping the "new" military children, the children of members of the National Guard and Reserves, who may be dealing with deployment for the first time. NMFA is pleased to report that most schools charged with educating military children are stepping up to the challenge. They have become the constant in a changing world and the place of security for military children and their families. The goal, according to one school official, "is to keep things normal for the kids." The schools' role is to "train teachers in what to look for and deal with what they find." NMFA has received many positive stories from parents and schools about how the schools have helped children deal with their fears, keep in touch with deployed parents, and keep focused on learning. In the process, these schools have increased the understanding of their teachers and other staff, as well as their entire communities, about issues facing military families.

A well-funded Impact Aid program enables districts serving large numbers of military children to meet their students' unique needs and approach the level of educational opportunity available in neighboring, non-impacted school districts even though they do not have access to the same kind of tax base. The local community, the people with the greatest stake in the quality of education in their schools, decides how Impact Aid funds will best serve the basic education needs of all students. Impact Aid funds for special education provide valuable assistance to help the most vulnerable military children receive the education services they need.

Military families and their civilian neighbors do not understand why Impact Aid funds fall short of the levels intended by the creators of the program or of the amount needed by their children's schools. They want to know why a program so important to the education of their children is not an entitlement and why it is not forward-funded so that their school districts can plan and budget properly. The intent of the original Impact Aid legislation (P.L. 81-874) was "to provide financial assistance for those local educational agencies upon which the United States has placed financial burden." Military children, whether living on- or off-base, impose costs on the district as they move in and out: records must be prepared, evaluations and testing must be done for special programs, transition labs or remedial programs may be needed. The Federal government's responsibility, as outlined in the Impact Aid law, is to provide funding in lieu of the taxes lost to enable school districts to meet children's educational needs on an equal footing with districts not affected by a Federal presence.

Military families also look to Congress to ensure that construction funds are provided to continue to fix Department of Education owned buildings and that other Impact Aid construction funds are allocated equitably. We hope that Congress will work with DoD during the upcoming round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), as well as the realignment of military installations overseas, to ensure that civilian school districts have both the basic Impact Aid support and construction assistance necessary to deal with any resulting enrollment shifts of military children.

The education of a military child is a continuum. As the military child moves from school district to district—from a school receiving Impact Aid in California, to another Impact Aid school in Texas, to a Department of Defense school in Japan, to an Impact Aid school in Kansas—the quality of education she receives in one school will affect the education she and her classmates receive in the next. Children whose schools are unable to provide necessary educational services could easily fall behind their peers in other districts. Schools serving these children could face difficulties in maintaining accreditation as states implement tough new standards. A smooth transition into their next school, whether across the state or around the world, benefits military children, their classmates, and their communities. The Impact Aid Program enables districts affected by the presence of a military installation to offer not only a quality basic education program, but also the support services needed by military children and their classmates. We thank you, the Members of this Subcommittee, for your leadership in this partnership for the education of military children. We ask you to continue this role by meeting the Federal obligation to keep the Impact Aid program strong.

The National Military Family Association (NMFA) is the only national organization whose sole focus is the military family and whose goal is to influence the development and implementation of policies that will improve the lives of those family members. Our mission is to serve the families of the seven uniformed services through education, information, and advocacy.

Founded in 1969 as the Military Wives Association, NMFA is a non-profit 501(c)(3) primarily volunteer organization. NMFA today represents the interests of family members and the

active duty, National Guard, Reserve, and retired personnel of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Public Health Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

NMFA volunteer Representatives in military communities worldwide provide a direct link between military families and NMFA's staff in the nation's capital. Representatives are the "eyes and ears" of NMFA, bringing shared local concerns to national attention.

NMFA receives no federal grants and has no federal contracts.

NMFA's web site is located at <http://www.nmfa.org>.

Kathleen B. Moakler, Deputy Director, Government Relations

Kathleen has been associated with the National Military Family Association since 1995 as a member of the headquarters staff. She has served as Legislative Administrative Assistant and Senior Issues Specialist in the Government Relations department, NMFA Office Manager, and since June 2003, as the Deputy Director, Government Relations. Her job requires a broad knowledge of the range of issues relevant to the quality of life of the families of the seven uniformed services. An Army spouse of over 28 years, Kathleen has a vast experience both volunteer and paid. She has served in many leadership positions in civilian and military community organizations over the years.

Through the years Kathleen has worked with many military community programs including hospital consumer boards, commanders' boards, family readiness groups, church councils and the Army Family Action Plan at all levels. She believes that communication is paramount in the efficient delivery of services and the fostering of a rich community life for military families. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from the State University of New York at Albany. Kathleen has been awarded the Army Commanders Award for Public Service.

In addition to her work at NMFA, Kathleen participates as a member of the Contemporary Choir at the Chapel at Ft. Belvoir VA and enjoys traveling to historic sites. She has a new role as a military mom. Her daughter is an Army nurse recently returned from a year in Iraq and her second son is an active-duty Army Guardsman involved in homeland defense in New York. Her oldest son is an aspiring actor in Hollywood, California. Kathleen and her husband Marty reside in Alexandria, Virginia.